



Health & Safety

for working at a school allotment



A quick guide and reminder for all employees and volunteers with many recommendations from the RHS Campaign for School



From the **RHS Campaign for School Gardening's** [website](#):

‘Gardens can provide young people with an amazing opportunity to develop a huge number of skills and are great for supporting physical and mental wellbeing. However, it is vital to ensure that anyone working out in the garden, no matter what age, understands how to work safely in the garden and how to look out for hazards and risks.’

It's very important to always be aware of health & safety at a school allotment for you own safety and for the safety of children too. We highly recommend your read over the charity's full **Health & Safety policy** which contains a full **risk assessment** too.

This quick guide as be designed to give volunteers guidance when working at a school allotment to help keep themselves safe and everyone else too.

Here are some of the main hazards to be aware of when working at a school allotment/garden as recommend by the **RHS Campaign for School Gardening**:



The soil:



It is worth remembering that soil contains many millions of bacteria and other micro-organisms. Most are harmless but some are potentially very dangerous. Try not to let children have contact with soil if they have a cut and be vigilant that children are not sucking their fingers, and insist on good hand-washing and glove wearing. This goes for adults too.

Plants:



Some plants can cause allergic reactions for some individuals e.g. grasses can cause hayfever, rue can cause blisters. Other plants have poisonous parts if eaten such as laburnum seeds, potato fruits and fungi, and many common bulbs can be toxic if eaten such as daffodils. This doesn't mean you shouldn't allow children to plant them but be sure to educate young people on the importance of staying safe and washing hands. You can find out about [which plants could be harmful here](#).

Insects:



At certain times of the year, there will be a profusion of different insects e.g. bees in spring and summer; wasps in summer and autumn; mosquitoes and midges in summer; and red ants in spring, summer and autumn. Teach children to recognise these if they don't already know them. You can use our [pollinating insects spotter guide](#) to help your children identify the difference between these insects and also help them to understand why these insects are helpful in the garden, even if we'd prefer to keep away from them!

Other animals and wildlife:



Encourage young people to be mindful of other creatures living in the garden. They aren't always harmful such as hedgehogs, frogs or birds, but it is good practice to garden safely and be careful not to disturb or injure them. Cat, dog and fox faeces can also carry an extremely harmful micro-organism, *Toxocara canis*, which can cause blindness. Do not garden with children on areas likely to be visited by these animals or ensure you have checked the site beforehand. If children come across any faeces, make sure they know to notify an adult.

Garden chemicals:



Many people garden with chemicals, which are potentially harmful both to people and to wildlife. As a matter of principle, it is the best policy, and the policy of The Papillon Project, to not allow any chemicals into the school garden. If you do have chemicals around, such as plant feed, ensure they cannot be easily reached by very young people and that older students know how to use them safely.

Tools:



Tools can be dangerous and are often designed to be used by adults. Do not take anything for granted and remember that most children will need to be instructed on how to carry and handle tools.

It's extremely important to be aware of tools that are being used at a school allotment. Using them correctly is very much for your safety as well as the safety of the children (feel free to educate children about tool safety and teachers too!).

Here is what the **RHS Campaign for School Gardening** recommends:

- 1. Explain that gardeners need tools to help them with their gardening tasks.**
- 2. Ask a learner to pick up a tool and guess what it is used for in gardening. Let them have a practice with it in a bed or growing area.**
- 3. Name the tool and its gardening uses - ask a pupil to demonstrate how it is used.**
- 4. Repeat this with other tools and let other children have a turn.**
- 5. Discuss why it is sensible to have a safe area where tools are stored when not in use.**
- 6. Demonstrate how to carry and work with tools safely and to clean off tools with a brush at the end of a session.**
- 7. Ask learners to pick out the broken tool and state why it is unsafe to use.**

Second hand and restored tools

Although not strictly linked to health & safety (but do always keep an eye on vintage or second hand tools to make sure they're in good working condition) The Papillon Project advocates that second hand tools are used in schools. We believe that 'secondhandness' sets a good example to young people and is better for the environment too. You can learn more about this and our 'Tool Bank' via our website (please [click here](#)).

Using power tools:

- Please check in with Matt if you are looking to use any power tools at a school allotment.
- When using power tools mowers, strimmers, etc, then the power tool user must wear the appropriate clothing, i.e. gloves, boots, safety glasses etc.
- Where a person is strimming care must be taken that materials being shot off do not cause injury or damage to other persons or property.

Slippery ground and wet weather:



Gardens will often be slippery and grass, wet soil, paths, decking etc. can all provide a hazard if children are not careful. Point this out regularly as a risk, or put signage in place. Get your children to make signs for these areas using the fun activity '[Make signs & labels](#)'. Also ensure pupils always wear the right footwear for the weather and activity.

First Aid:



We always recommend you bring your own First Aid with you onto a school allotment/garden to use on yourself if required. Schools always have a qualified First Aider during school hours should you require First Aid. If you require First Aid or obtain any injury whilst volunteering, you **must** inform the charity.

Matt Willer, the charity's School Projects' Lead has valid First Aid at Work certificate (expires in June 2024). If he is present at school allotment with you, he can administrate First Aid otherwise the school will be able to provide First Aid should it be needed.

Working alone:

It is not recommended to work alone for health and safety along with safeguarding reasons (please refer to the charity's 'Safeguarding Quick Guide') too. However, we understand that volunteers might arrive early or be the last to leave a school allotment, but it is always advised, if possible, to be present with another adult.

If there is no alternative to work alone, it is good practice to tell the charity (School Projects Lead or another volunteer) that you are visiting a site. Give them an idea how long you will be and carry a mobile phone too. It would also be sensible to inform the adult when you safely left the school allotment.

Suitable workwear and weather preparation:



Please make sure that you are dressed appropriately for working at a school allotment and for the correct season too (i.e. warm clothes in winter and sunhats in summer). You should always wear gloves to protect your hands and certainly have suitable footwear too (steel capped boots are ideal). Use sunscreen to protect yourself from over exposure to the sun and consume plenty of fluids in hot weather.

Lifting heavy things



Working at any allotment sometimes requires lifting heavy things. Please don't lift anything that is clearly too heavy for one person. Ask for help from another adult and always make sure you bend with your knees and not your back! It's always very sensible to wear steel capped boots to avoid any potential foot injuries.